

**WRITING SAMPLE**

**THE NEGRO PROJECT:  
MARGARET SANGER'S EUGENIC PLAN FOR BLACK AMERICANS**

*By Tanya L. Green*

*“... I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing;  
therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.”*

*—Deuteronomy 30:19 (NKJV)*

On the crisp, sunny, fall Columbus Day in 1999, organizers of the “Say So” march approached the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court. The marchers, who were predominantly black pastors and lay persons, concluded their three-day protest at the site of two monumental cases: the school desegregation *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the pro-abortion *Roe v. Wade* (1973). The significance of each case—equal rights for all Americans in the former, and abortion “rights” in the latter—converged in the declaration of Rev. Johnny M. Hunter, the march’s sponsor and national director of Life, Education and Resource Network (LEARN), the largest black pro-life organization.

“Civil rights’ doesn’t mean anything without a right to life!” declared Hunter. He and the other marchers were protesting the disproportionately high number of abortions in the black community. The high number is no accident. Many Americans—black and white—are unaware of Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger’s Negro Project. Sanger created this program in 1939, after the organization changed its name from the American Birth Control League (ABCL) to the Birth Control Federation of America (BCFA).<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the program was to restrict—many believe exterminate—the black population. Under the pretense of “better health” and “family planning,” Sanger cleverly implemented her plan. What’s more shocking is Sanger’s beguilement of black America’s *crème de la crème*—those prominent, well educated and well-to-do—into executing her scheme. Some within the black elite saw birth control as a means to attain economic empowerment, elevate the race and garner the respect of whites.

The Negro Project has had lasting repercussions in the black community: “We have become victims of genocide by our own hands,” cried Hunter at the “Say So” march.

## MALTHUSIAN EUGENICS

Margaret Sanger aligned herself with the eugenicists whose ideology prevailed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eugenicists strongly espoused racial supremacy and “purity,” particularly of the “Aryan” race. Eugenicists hoped to purify the bloodlines and improve the race by encouraging the “fit” to reproduce and the “unfit” to restrict their reproduction. They sought to contain the “inferior” races through segregation, sterilization, birth control and abortion.

Sanger embraced Malthusian eugenics. Thomas Robert Malthus, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century cleric and professor of political economy, believed a population time bomb threatened the existence of the human race.<sup>2</sup> He viewed social problems such as poverty, deprivation and hunger as evidence of this “population crisis.” According to writer George Grant, Malthus condemned charities and other forms of benevolence, because he believed they only exacerbated the problems. His answer was to restrict population growth of certain groups of people.<sup>3</sup> His theories of population growth and economic stability became the basis for national and international social policy. Grant quotes from Malthus’ magnum opus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, published in six editions from 1798 to 1826:

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<sup>1</sup>The BCFA members voted unanimously at a special January 29, 1942, meeting to change the organization’s name to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. By then, BCFA had 34 state league affiliates. The state leagues followed suit in changing their name and bylaws. Particularly, the New York State Federation for Planned Parenthood’s old bylaws stipulated that the object was: “To develop and organize on sound *eugenic*, social and medical principles, interest in and knowledge of *birth control* throughout the State of New York as permitted by law [emphasis added].” The new bylaws replaced “birth control” with “planned parenthood.” “Eugenics” was dropped in 1943 because of its unpopular association with the German government’s race-improving eugenics theories. Robert G. Marshall and Charles A. Donovan, *Blessed are the Barren: The Social Policy of Planned Parenthood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on population control, go to CWA’s Web site at <http://www.cwfa.org/library/life/#control> or call 1-800-458-8797.

<sup>3</sup> George Grant, *Killer Angel* (Franklin, Tennessee: Ars Vitae Press, 1995), 50.

*All children born, beyond what would be required to keep up the population to a desired level, must necessarily perish, unless room is made for them by the deaths of grown persons. We should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavoring to impede, the operations of nature in producing this mortality.*<sup>4</sup>

Malthus' disciples believed if Western civilization were to survive, the physically unfit, the *materially poor*, the spiritually diseased, the *racially inferior*, and the mentally incompetent had to be suppressed and isolated—or even, perhaps, eliminated. His disciples felt the subtler and more “scientific” approaches of education, *contraception*, sterilization and *abortion* were more “practical and acceptable ways” to ease the pressures of the alleged overpopulation.<sup>5</sup>

Critics of Malthusianism said the group “produced a new vocabulary of mumbo-jumbo. It was all hard-headed, scientific and relentless.” Further, historical facts have proved the Malthusian mathematical scheme regarding overpopulation to be inaccurate, though many still believe them.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the falsehoods of Malthus' overpopulation claims, Sanger nonetheless immersed herself in Malthusian eugenics. Grant wrote she argued for birth control using the “scientifically verified” threat of poverty, sickness, racial tension and overpopulation as its background. Sanger's publication, *The Birth Control Review* (founded in 1917) regularly published pro-eugenic articles from eugenicists, such as Ernst Rudin.<sup>7</sup> Although Sanger ceased editing *The Birth Control Review* in 1929, the ABCL continued to use it as a platform for eugenic ideas.

Sanger built the work of the ABCL, and, ultimately, Planned Parenthood, on the ideas and resources of the eugenics movement. Grant reported that “virtually all of the organization's board members were eugenicists.” Eugenicists financed the early projects, from the opening of birth control clinics to the publishing of “revolutionary” literature. Eugenicists comprised the speakers at conferences, authors of literature and the providers of services “almost without exception.” And Planned Parenthood's international work was originally housed in the offices of the Eugenics Society. The two organizations were intertwined for years.<sup>8</sup>

The ABCL became a legal entity on April 22, 1922, in New York. Before that, Sanger illegally operated a birth control clinic in October 1916, in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, New York, which eventually closed. The clinic serviced the poor immigrants who heavily populated the area—those deemed “unfit” to reproduce.<sup>9</sup>

Sanger's early writings clearly reflected Malthus' influence. She writes:

*Organized charity itself is the symptom of a malignant social disease. Those vast, complex, interrelated organizations aiming to control and to diminish the spread of misery and destitution and all the menacing evils that spring out of this sinisterly fertile soil, are the surest sign that our civilization has bred, is breeding and perpetuating constantly increasing numbers of defectives, delinquents and dependents.*<sup>10</sup>

In another passage, she decries the burden of “human waste” on society:

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>6</sup> Grant, rev., *Grand Illusions: The Legacy of Planned Parenthood*, 2nd ed. (Franklin, Tennessee: Adroit Press, 1992), 56.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 95-96. Rudin worked as Adolf Hitler's director of genetic sterilization and founded the Nazi Society for Racial Hygiene.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>9</sup> Marshall and Donovan, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (New York: Brentano's, 1922), 108.

*It [charity] encourages the healthier and more normal sections of the world to shoulder the burden of unthinking and indiscriminate fecundity of others; which brings with it, as I think the reader must agree, a dead weight of human waste. Instead of decreasing and aiming to **eliminate** the stocks that are most detrimental to the future of the race and the world, it tends to render them to a menacing degree dominant [emphasis added].*<sup>11</sup>

She concluded,

*The most serious charge that can be brought against modern “benevolence” is that it encourages the perpetuation of defectives, delinquents and dependents. These are the most dangerous elements in the world community, the most devastating curse on human progress and expression.*<sup>12</sup>

The *Review* printed an excerpt of an address Sanger gave in 1926. In it she said:

*It now remains for the U.S. government to set a sensible example to the world by offering a bonus or yearly pension to all obviously unfit parents who allow themselves to be **sterilized** by harmless and scientific means. In this way the moron and the diseased would have no posterity to inherit their unhappy condition. The number of the feeble-minded would decrease and a heavy burden would be lifted from the shoulders of the fit.*<sup>13</sup>

Sanger said a “bonus” would be “wise and profitable” and “the salvation of American civilization.”<sup>14</sup> She presented her ideas to Mr. C. Harold Smith (of the *New York Evening World*) on “the welfare committee” in New York City. She said, “people must be helped to help themselves.” Any plan or program that would make them “dependent upon doles and charities” is “paternalistic” and would not be “of any permanent value.” She included an essay (what she called a “program of public welfare,”) entitled “We Must Breed a Race of Thoroughbreds.”<sup>15</sup>

In it she argued that birth control clinics, or bureaus, should be established “in which men and women will be taught the science of parenthood and the science of breeding.” For this was the way “to breed out of the race the scourges of transmissible disease, mental defect, poverty, lawlessness, crime ... since these classes would be *decreasing* in number instead of **breeding like weeds** [emphasis added].”<sup>16</sup>

Her program called for women to receive birth control advice in various situations, including where:

- the woman or man had a “transmissible” disease such as insanity, feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, syphilis, etc.;

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Sanger, “The Function of Sterilization,” *The Birth Control Review*, October 1926, 299. Sanger delivered the address before the Institute of Euthenics at Vassar College on August 5, 1926. Sanger’s address sounds eerily familiar to the 1999 controversial Children Requiring a Caring Community (CRACK) program. The program offered to pay drug-addicted women \$200 cash if they underwent sterilization or had long-term chemical birth control (which may actually cause abortion in the very early stages of pregnancy) inserted into their bodies. The billboard ads were placed in inner cities. See CWA’s January/February 2000 publication of *Family Voice*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Smith, which included her essay, 7 May 1929, Margaret Sanger Collection, Library of Congress (MSCLC).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

- the children already born were “subnormal or feeble-minded”;
- the father’s wages were “inadequate ... to provide for more children.”

Sanger said “such a plan would ... reduce the birthrate among the diseased, the sickly, the poverty stricken and anti-social classes, elements unable to provide for themselves, and the burden of which we are all forced to carry.”<sup>17</sup>

Sanger had openly embraced Malthusian eugenics, and it shaped her actions in the ensuing years.

## THE HARLEM CLINIC

In 1929, 10 years before Sanger created the Negro Project, the ABCL laid the groundwork for a clinic in Harlem, a largely black section of New York City. It was the dawn of the Great Depression, and for blacks that meant double the misery. Blacks faced harsher conditions of desperation and privation because of widespread racial prejudice and discrimination. From the ABCL’s perspective, Harlem was the ideal place for this “experimental clinic,” which officially opened on November 21, 1930. Many blacks looked to escape their adverse circumstances and therefore did not recognize the eugenic undercurrent of the clinic. The clinic relied on the generosity of private foundations to remain in business.<sup>18</sup> In addition to being thought of as “inferior” and disproportionately represented in the underclass, according to the clinic’s own files used to justify its “work,” blacks in Harlem:

- were segregated in an over-populated area (224,760 of 330,000 of greater New York’s black population lived in Harlem during the late 1920s and 1930s);
- comprised 12 percent of New York City’s population, but accounted for 18.4 percent of New York City’s unemployment;
- had an infant mortality rate of 101 per 1000 births, compared to 56 among whites;
- had a death rate from tuberculosis—237 per 100,000—that was highest in central Harlem, out of all of New York City.<sup>19</sup>

Although the clinic served whites as well as blacks, it “was established for the benefit of the colored people.” Sanger wrote this in a letter to Dr. W. E. Burghardt DuBois,<sup>20</sup> one of the day’s most influential blacks. A sociologist and author, he helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 to improve the living conditions of black Americans.

That blacks endured extreme prejudice and discrimination, which contributed greatly to their plight, seemed to further justify restricting their numbers. Many believed the solution lay in reducing reproduction. Sanger suggested the answer to poverty and degradation lay in smaller numbers of blacks. She convinced black civic groups in Harlem of the “benefits” of birth control, under the cloak of “better health” (i.e., reduction of maternal and infant death; child spacing) and “family planning.” So with their cooperation, and the endorsement of *The Amsterdam News* (a

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Nathan W. Levin, comptroller for the Julius Rosenwald Fund, responding to Sanger’s request for funds, which opens with, “I am pleased to enclose our check in the amount of \$2,500, representing the balance of our appropriation to the Harlem Birth Control Clinic for 1930.” 5 January 1931, MSCLC.

<sup>19</sup> The Harlem Clinic 1929 file, MSCLC.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Sanger to Dr. W. E. Burghardt DuBois, 11 November 1930, New York, MSCLC. DuBois served as director of research for the NAACP and as the editor of its publication, *The Crisis*, until 1934.

prominent black newspaper), Sanger established the Harlem branch of the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau.<sup>21</sup> The ABCL told the community birth control was the answer to their predicament.

Sanger shrewdly used the influence of prominent blacks to reach the masses with this message. She invited DuBois and a host of Harlem's leading blacks, including physicians, social workers, ministers and journalists, to form an advisory council to help direct the clinic "so that our work in birth control will be a constructive force in the community."<sup>22</sup> She knew the importance of having black professionals on the advisory board and in the clinic; she knew blacks would instinctively suspect whites of wanting to decrease their numbers. She would later use this knowledge to implement the Negro Project.

Sanger convinced the community so well that Harlem's largest black church, the Abyssinian Baptist Church, held a mass meeting featuring Sanger as the speaker.<sup>23</sup> But that event received criticism. At least one "very prominent minister of a denomination other than Baptist" spoke out against Sanger. Dr. Adam Clayton Powell Sr., pastor of Abyssinian Baptist, "received adverse criticism" from the (unnamed) minister who was "surprised that he'd allow that awful woman in his church."<sup>24</sup>

Grace Congregational Church hosted a debate on birth control. Proponents argued birth control was necessary to regulate births in proportion to the family's income; spacing births would help mothers recover physically and fathers financially; physically strong and mentally sound babies would result; and incidences of communicable diseases would decrease.

Opponents contended that as a minority group blacks needed to *increase* rather than decrease and that they needed an equal distribution of wealth to improve their status. In the end, the debate judges decided the proponents were more persuasive: Birth control would improve the status of blacks.<sup>25</sup> Still, there were others who equated birth control with abortion and therefore considered it immoral.

Eventually, the Urban League took control of the clinic,<sup>26</sup> an indication the black community had become ensnared in Sanger's labyrinth.

## BIRTH CONTROL AS A SOLUTION

The Harlem clinic and ensuing birth control debate opened dialogue among blacks about how best to improve their disadvantageous position. Some viewed birth control as a viable solution: High reproduction, they believed, meant prolonged poverty and degradation. Desperate for change, others began to accept the "rationale" of birth control. A few embraced eugenics. The June 1932 edition of *The Birth Control Review*, called "The Negro Number," featured a series of articles written by blacks on the "virtues" of birth control.

The editorial posed this question: "Shall they go in for quantity or quality in children? Shall they bring children into the world to enrich the undertakers, the physicians and furnish work for social workers and jailers, or shall they produce children who are going to be an asset to

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Sanger to Dr. Peter Marshall Murray, asking for his sponsorship of the clinic, 2 December 1930, MSCLC.

<sup>23</sup> Flier, 7 December 1932, MSCLC.

<sup>24</sup> BCCRB memo, 3 February 1933, MSCLC. Both Powell and his son, Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., were part of the black elite. The younger Powell established himself as an effective civil rights leader during the Depression years when he fought discrimination against black workers. He succeeded his father as pastor in 1936. He served on the National Advisory Council to the Birth Control Federation of America (BCFA) during the implementation of the Negro Project. He later served as an U.S. representative from 1945 until 1969.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Elizabeth G. Lautermilch, R.N., to Sanger, which included two (undated) newspaper clippings from leading black papers, 19 November 1932, MSCLC.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Sanger to Margaret Ensign, 17 April 1933, MSCLC.

the group and American society?” The answer: “Most [blacks], especially women, would choose quality ... if they only knew how.”<sup>27</sup>

DuBois, in his article “Black Folk and Birth Control,” noted the “inevitable clash of ideals between those Negroes who were striving to improve their economic position and those whose religious faith made the limitation of children a sin.”<sup>28</sup> He criticized the “mass of ignorant Negroes” who bred “carelessly and disastrously so that the increase among [them] ... is from that part of the population least intelligent and fit, and least able to rear their children properly.”<sup>29</sup>

DuBois called for a “more liberal attitude” among black churches. He said they were open to “*intelligent propaganda of any sort*, and the American Birth Control League and other agencies ought to get their speakers before church congregations and their arguments in the Negro newspapers [emphasis added].”<sup>30</sup>

Charles S. Johnson, Fisk University’s first black president, wrote “eugenic discrimination” was necessary for blacks.<sup>31</sup> He said the high maternal and infant mortality rates, along with diseases like tuberculosis, typhoid, malaria and venereal infection, made it difficult for large families to adequately sustain themselves.

Further, “the status of Negroes as marginal workers, their confinement to the lowest paid branches of industry, the necessity for the labors of mothers, as well as children, to balance meager budgets, are factors [that] emphasize the need for lessening the burden not only for themselves, but of society, which must provide the supplementary support in the form of relief.”<sup>32</sup> Johnson later served on the National Advisory Council to the BCFA, becoming integral to the Negro Project.

Writer Walter A. Terpenning described bringing a black child into a hostile world as “pathetic.” In his article “God’s Chillun,” he wrote:

*The birth of a colored child, even to parents who can give it adequate support, is pathetic in view of the unchristian and undemocratic treatment likely to be accorded it at the hands of a predominantly white community, and the **denial of choice** in propagation to this unfortunate class is **nothing less than barbarous** [emphasis added].*<sup>33</sup>

Terpenning considered birth control for blacks as “the more humane provision” and “more eugenic” than among whites. He felt birth control information should have first been disseminated among blacks rather than the white upper crust.<sup>34</sup> He failed to look at the problematic attitudes and behavior of society and how they suppressed blacks. He offered no solutions to the injustice and vile racism that blacks endured.

Sadly, DuBois’ words of black churches being “open to intelligent propaganda” proved prophetic. Black pastors invited Sanger to speak to their congregations. Black publications, like *The Afro-American* and *The Chicago Defender*, featured her writings. Rather than attacking the root causes of maternal and infant deaths, diseases, poverty, unemployment and a host of other social ills—not the least of which was racism—Sanger pushed birth control. To many, it was better for blacks not to be born rather than endure such a harsh existence.

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<sup>27</sup> George S. Schuyler, “Quantity or Quality,” *The Birth Control Review*, June 1932, 166.

<sup>28</sup> DuBois, 166.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>31</sup> Charles S. Johnson, “A Question of Negro Health,” *The Birth Control Review*, June 1932, 167-169.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>33</sup> Walter A. Terpenning, “God’s Chillun,” *The Birth Control Review*, June 1932, 172.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Against this setting, Sanger charmed the black community's most distinguished leaders into accepting her plan, which was designed to their own detriment. She peddled her wares wrapped in pretty packages labeled "better health" and "family planning." No one could deny the benefits of better health, being financially ready to raise children, or spacing one's children. However, the solution to the real issues affecting blacks did not lay in reducing their numbers. It lay in attacking the forces in society that hindered their progress. Most importantly, one had to discern Sanger's motive behind her push for birth control in the community. It was not an altruistic one.

## WEB OF DECEIT

Prior to 1939, Sanger's "outreach to the black community was largely limited to her Harlem clinic and speaking at black churches."<sup>35</sup> Her vision for "the reproductive practices of black Americans" expanded after the January 1939 merger of the Clinical Research Bureau and the American Birth Control League to form the Birth Control Federation of America. She selected Dr. Clarence J. Gamble, of the soap-manufacturing company Procter and Gamble, to be the BCFA regional director of the South.

Gamble wrote a memorandum in November 1939 entitled "Suggestions for the Negro Project," in which he recognized that "black leaders might regard birth control as an extermination plot." He suggested black leaders be placed in positions where it would *appear* they were in charge.<sup>36</sup> Yet Sanger's reply reflects Gamble's ambivalence about having blacks in authoritative positions:

*I note that you doubt it worthwhile to employ a full-time Negro physician. It seems to me from my experience ... that, while the colored Negroes have great respect for white doctors, they can get closer to their own members and more or less lay their cards on the table, which means their ignorance, superstitions and doubts. They do not do this with white people and if we can train the Negro doctor at the clinic, he can go among them with enthusiasm and ... knowledge, which ... will have far-reaching results among the colored people.<sup>37</sup>*

Another project director lamented:

*I wonder if Southern Darkies can ever be entrusted with ... a clinic. Our experience causes us to doubt their ability to work except under white supervision.<sup>38</sup>*

Sanger knew blacks were a religious people—and how useful ministers would be to her project. She wrote in the same letter:

*The minister's work is also important and he should be trained, perhaps by the Federation as to our ideals and the goal that we hope to reach. **We do not want word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population, and the minister is the man***

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<sup>35</sup> Marshall and Donovan, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Sanger to Gamble, 10 December 1939, MSCLC.

<sup>38</sup> Grant, 97.



*who can straighten out that idea if it ever occurs to any of their more rebellious members* [emphasis added].<sup>39</sup>

Sanger's cohorts within the BCFA sought to attract black leadership. They succeeded. The list of black leaders who made up BCFA's National Advisory Council reads like a "who's who" among black Americans. To name a few:<sup>40</sup>

- Claude A. Barnett, director, Associated Negro Press, Chicago
- Michael J. Bent, M.D., Meharry Medical School, Nashville
- Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, president, National Council of Negro Women, Washington, D.C., special advisor to President Roosevelt on minority groups, and founder of Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona Beach
- Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, cum laude graduate of Tufts, president of Alpha Kappa Alpha (the nation's oldest black sorority), Washington, D.C.
- Charles S. Johnson, president, Fisk University, Nashville
- Eugene Kinckle Jones, executive secretary, National Urban League, New York
- Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., pastor, Abyssinian Baptist Church, New York
- Bishop David H. Sims, pastor, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Philadelphia
- Arthur Spingarn, president, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Even with this impressive list, Sanger ran into resistance when she tried to present a birth control exhibit at the 1940 American Negro Exposition, a fair that traces the progress blacks have made since the Emancipation Proclamation, in Chicago. After inviting the BCFA to display its exhibit, the Exposition's board later cancelled, citing "last minute changes in floor space."<sup>41</sup>

Sanger did not buy this and issued a statement urging public protest. "This has come as a complete surprise," said Sanger, "since the Federation undertook preparation of the exhibit upon an express invitation from a member of the Exposition board."<sup>42</sup> She said the cancellation resulted from "concerted action on the part of representatives of the Roman Catholic Church." She even accused the church of threatening officials with the withholding of promised federal and state funds needed to hold the Exposition.<sup>43</sup>

Her statement mentioned BCFA prepared the exhibit in consultation with its National (Negro) Advisory Council, and it illustrated "the need for birth control as a public health measure."<sup>44</sup> She said the objective was to demonstrate how birth control would "improve the welfare of the Negro population," noting the maternal death rate among black mothers was nearly 50 percent higher, and the child death rate was more than one-third greater than the white community.<sup>45</sup>

At Sanger's urging, protesters of the cancellation sent letters to Attorney Wendall E. Green, vice chairman of the Afro-Merican Emancipation Exposition Commission (sponsor of the Exposition), requesting he investigate. Green denied there was any threat or pressure to withhold funds needed to finance the Exposition. Further, he said the Exposition commission (of Illinois)

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<sup>39</sup> Sanger to Gamble, 10 December 1939.

<sup>40</sup> BCFA Division of Negro Service, stationery, 1940, MSCLC.

<sup>41</sup> BCFA stationery, July 1940, MSCLC.

<sup>42</sup> BCFA statement, 8 July 1940, MSCLC.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 3.

“unanimously passed a resolution,” which read in part: “That in the promotion, conduct and accomplishment of the objectives (of the Exposition) there must be an abiding spirit to create goodwill toward all people.”<sup>46</sup> He added that since the funds for the Exposition “came from citizens of all races and creeds, any exhibit in conflict with the known convictions of any religious group contravenes the spirit of the resolution,”<sup>47</sup> which seemed to support Catholic opposition. The commission upheld the ban on the exhibit.

### ‘BETTER HEALTH FOR 13,000,000’

The propaganda of the Negro Project was that birth control meant better health. So on this premise, the BCFA designed two southern Negro Project “demonstration programs” to show “how medically-supervised birth control integrated into existing public health services could improve the general welfare of Negroes, and to initiate a nationwide educational program.”<sup>48</sup>

The BCFA opened the first clinic at the Bethlehem Center in urban Nashville, Tennessee (where blacks constituted only 25 percent of the population), on February 13, 1940. They extended the work to the Social Services Center of Fisk University (a historically black college) on July 23, 1940. This location was especially significant because of its proximity to Meharry Medical School, which trained more than 50 percent of black physicians in the United States.<sup>49</sup>

An analysis of the income of the Nashville group revealed that “no family, regardless of size, had an income over \$15 a week. The service obviously reached the income group for which it was designed,”<sup>50</sup> indicating the project’s target. The report claimed to have brought “to light serious diseases and making possible their treatment, ... [and] that 55 percent [354 of the 638] of the patients prescribed birth control methods used it consistently and successfully.”<sup>51</sup> However, the report presented “no definite figures ... to demonstrate the extent of community improvement.”<sup>52</sup>

The BCFA opened the second clinic on May 1, 1940, in rural Berkeley County, South Carolina, under the supervision of Dr. Robert E. Seibels, chairman of the Committee on Maternal Welfare of the South Carolina Medical Association.<sup>53</sup> BCFA chose this site in part “because leaders in the state were particularly receptive to the experiment. South Carolina had been the second state to make child spacing a part of its state public health program after a survey of the state’s maternal deaths showed that 25 percent occurred among mothers known to be physically unfit for pregnancy.”<sup>54</sup> Again, the message went out: Birth control—not better prenatal care—reduced maternal and infant mortality.

Although Berkeley County’s population was 70 percent black, the clinic received criticism that members of this group were “overwhelmingly in the majority.”<sup>55</sup> Seibels assured Claude Barnett that this was not the case. “We have ... simply given our help to those who were willing to receive it, and these usually are Negroes,” he said.<sup>56</sup>

While religious convictions significantly influenced the Nashville patients’ view of birth control, people in Berkeley County had “no religious prejudice against birth control. But the

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<sup>46</sup> Letter from Green to Mrs. J. B. Vandever (same form letter sent to other protestors), 17 July 1940, Chicago, MSCLC.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, M.D., “Negro Project” report, BCFA Annual Meeting, 29 January 1942, 1, MSCLC.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Charles S. Johnson, “Better Health for 13,000,000” report on Negro Project demonstration programs, 16 April 1943, 8, MSCLC.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Ferebee, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Seibels to Claude Barnett, 11 July 1940, 2, MSCLC.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

attitude that treatment of any disease was ‘against nature’ was in the air.”<sup>57</sup> Comparing the results of the two sites, “it is seen that the immediate receptivity to the demonstration was at the outset higher in the rural area.”<sup>58</sup> However, “the final total success was lower [in the rural area].” However, in Berkeley, “stark poverty was even more in evidence, and bad roads, bad weather and ignorance proved powerful counter forces [to the contraceptive programs].” After 18 months, the Berkeley program closed.<sup>59</sup>

The report indicated that, contrary to expectations, the lives of black patients serviced by the clinics did *not* improve dramatically from birth control. Two beliefs stood in the way: Some blacks likened birth control to abortion and others regarded it as “inherently immoral.”<sup>60</sup> However, “when thrown against the total pictures of the awareness on the part of Negro leaders of the improved conditions, . . . and their opportunities to even better conditions under Planned Parenthood, . . . the obstacles to the program are greatly outweighed,” said Dr. Dorothy Ferebee.<sup>61</sup>

A hint of eugenic flavor seasoned Ferebee’s speech: “The future program [of Planned Parenthood] should center around more education in the field through the work of a professional Negro worker, *because those of us who believe that the benefits of Planned Parenthood as a vital key to the elimination of human waste must reach the entire population* [emphasis added].”<sup>62</sup> She peppered her speech with the importance of “Negro professionals, fully integrated into the staff, . . . who could interpret the program and objectives to [other blacks] in the normal course of day-to-day contacts; could break down fallacious attitudes and beliefs and elements of distrust; could inspire the confidence of the group; *and would not be suspect of the intent to eliminate the race* [emphasis added].”<sup>63</sup>

Sanger even managed to lure the prominent—but hesitant—black minister J. T. Braun, editor in chief of the National Baptist Convention’s Sunday School Publishing Board in Nashville, Tennessee, into her deceptive web. Braun confessed to Sanger that “the very idea of such a thing [birth control] has always held the greatest hatred and contempt in my mind. . . . I am hesitant to give my full endorsement of this idea, until you send me, perhaps, some more convincing literature on the subject.”<sup>64</sup> Sanger happily complied. She sent Braun the Federal Council of Churches’ Marriage and Home Committee pamphlet praised by Bishop Sims (another member of the National Advisory Council), assuring him that: “There are some people who believe that birth control is an attempt to dictate to families how many children to have. Nothing could be further from the truth.”<sup>65</sup>

Sanger’s assistants gave Braun more pro-birth control literature and a copy of her autobiography, which he gave to his wife to read. Sanger’s message of preventing maternal and infant mortality stirred Braun’s wife. Now convinced of this need, Braun permitted a group of women to use his chapel for a birth-control talk.<sup>66</sup> “[I was] moved by the number of prominent [black] Christians backing the proposition,” Braun wrote in a letter to Sanger.<sup>67</sup> “At first glance I had a horrible shock to the proposition because it seemed to me to be allied to abortion, but after

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<sup>57</sup> Johnson, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>60</sup> Ferebee, “Planned Parenthood as a Public Health For the Negro Race,” BCFA Annual Meeting, 29 January 1942, 3, MSCLC.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 4-5. Ferebee was not the only black woman Planned Parenthood used to sing its praises. Faye Wattleton, also attractive, articulate and well educated, served as president from 1978 until 1992. She currently serves as president for the Center for Gender Equality in New York City.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from J. T. Braun to Sanger, 8 December 1941, MSCLC.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Sanger to Braun, 22 December 1941, MSCLC.

<sup>66</sup> Marshall and Donovan, 21.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

thought and prayer, I have concluded that especially among many women, it is *necessary* both to save the lives of mothers and children [emphasis added].”<sup>68</sup>

By 1949, Sanger had hoodwinked black America’s best and brightest into believing birth control’s “life-saving benefits.” In a monumental feat, she bewitched virtually an entire network of black social, professional and academic organizations<sup>69</sup> into endorsing Planned Parenthood’s eugenic program.<sup>70</sup>

Sanger’s successful duplicity does not in any way suggest blacks were gullible. They certainly wanted to decrease maternal and infant mortality and improve the community’s overall health. They wholly accepted her message because it seemed to promise prosperity and social acceptance. Sanger used their vulnerabilities and their ignorance (of her deliberately hidden agenda) to her advantage. Aside from birth control, she offered no other medical or social solutions to their adversity. Surely, blacks would not have been such willing accomplices had they perceived her true intentions. Considering the role eugenics played in the early birth control movement—and Sanger’s embracing of that ideology—the notion of birth control as seemingly the *only* solution to the problems that plagued blacks should have been much more closely scrutinized.

## ‘SCIENTIFIC RACISM’

Planned Parenthood has gone to great lengths to repudiate the organization’s eugenic origins.<sup>71</sup> It adamantly denies Sanger was a eugenicist or racist, despite evidence to the contrary. Because Sanger stopped editing *The Birth Control Review* in 1929, the organization tries to disassociate her from the eugenic and racist-oriented articles published after that date. However, a summary of an address Sanger gave in 1932, which appeared in the *Review* that year, revealed her continuing bent toward eugenics.

In “A Plan for Peace,” Sanger suggested Congress set up a special department to study population problems and appoint a “Parliament of Population.” One of the main objectives of the “Population Congress” would be “to raise the level and increase the general intelligence of population.” This would be accomplished by applying a “stern and rigid policy of sterilization and segregation [in addition to tightening immigration laws] to that grade of population whose progeny is already tainted, or whose inheritance is such that objectionable traits may be transmitted to offspring.”<sup>72</sup>

It’s reasonable to conclude that as the leader of Planned Parenthood—even after 1929—Sanger would not allow publication of ideas she didn’t support.

Sanger’s defenders argue she only wanted to educate blacks about birth control’s “health benefits.” However, she counted the very people she wanted to “educate” among the “unfit,” whose numbers needed to be restricted.

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<sup>68</sup> Marshall and Donovan’s quote from the 18 May 1943 letter from Braun to Sanger, 21.

<sup>69</sup> The list included: the NAACP, National Urban League, National Medical Association, National Association of Colored Nurses, Negro Newspapers Publishers Association and the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) memo to “State Legislatures and Local Committees from Field Service Department, Subject: Directory of National Negro Organizations with which the PPFA Has Developed Working Relationships,” 18 March 1949, MSCLC.

<sup>70</sup> The National Council of Negro Women became the first national women’s organization to appoint a permanent national committee on Family Planning on October 18, 1941. Division of Negro Service, Birth Control Federation of America newsletter, Christmas 1941, 3, MSCLC.

<sup>71</sup> Planned Parenthood, “Margaret Sanger,” October 2000 (<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/about/thisispp/sanger.html>). PPFA claims it has the “respect” of black leaders, like the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who compared the civil rights movement to the birth control movement. Dr. King was among the first recipients of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America’s Margaret Sanger Award in 1966, the year of her death.

<sup>72</sup> Margaret Sanger, “A Plan for Peace,” *The Birth Control Review*, April 1932, 107. Sanger gave this address before the New History Society on January 17, 1932, in New York City.

Grant presents other arguments Sanger’s supporters use to refute her racist roots:<sup>73</sup>

- blacks, Jews, Hispanics and other minorities are well represented in the “upper echelons” of Planned Parenthood Federation of America;
- the former, high-profile president of the organization, Faye Wattleton, is a black woman;
- “aggressive” minority hiring practices have been standard procedure for more than two decades;
- the “vast majority of the nation’s ethnic leadership solidly and actively supports the work” of the organization.

These justifications also fail because of what Grant calls “scientific racism.” This form of racism is based on genes, rather than skin color or language. “The issue is not ‘color of skin’ or ‘dialect of tongue,’” Grant writes, “but ‘*quality of genes* [emphasis added].”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, “as long as blacks, Jews and Hispanics demonstrate ‘a good quality gene pool’—as long as they ‘act white and think *white*’—then they are esteemed equally with Aryans. As long as they are, as Margaret Sanger said, ‘the best of their race,’ then they can be [counted] as *valuable* citizens [emphasis added].” By the same token, “individual whites” who show “dysgenic traits” must also have their fertility “curbed right along with the other ‘inferiors and undesirables.’”<sup>75</sup>

In short, writes Grant, “Scientific racism is an *equal opportunity discriminator* [emphasis added]. *Anyone* with a ‘defective gene pool’ is suspect. And *anyone* who shows promise may be admitted to the ranks of the elite.”<sup>76</sup>

The eugenic undertone is hard to miss. As Grant rightly comments, “The bottom line is that Planned Parenthood was self-consciously organized, in part, to promote and enforce White Supremacy. . . . It has been from its inception implicitly and explicitly racist.”<sup>77</sup>

“There is no way to escape the implications,” argues William L. Davis, a black financial analyst Grant quotes. “When an organization has a history of racism, when its literature is openly racist, when its goals are self-consciously racial, and when its programs invariably revolve around race, it doesn’t take an expert to realize that the organization is indeed *racist*.”<sup>78</sup>

## SANGER’S LEGACY

It is impossible to sever Planned Parenthood’s past from its present. Its legacy of lies and propaganda continues to infiltrate the black community. The poison is even more venomous because, in addition to birth control, Planned Parenthood touts abortion as a solution to the economic and social problems that plague the community. In its wake is the loss of more than 12 million lives within the black community alone. Planned Parenthood’s own records reflect this. For example, a 1992 report revealed that 23.2 percent of women who obtained abortions at its affiliates were black<sup>79</sup>—although blacks represent no more than 13 percent of the total population. In 1996, Planned Parenthood’s research arm reported: “Blacks, who make up 14

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<sup>73</sup> Grant, *Grand Illusions: The Legacy of Planned Parenthood*, 102.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>79</sup> Planned Parenthood Federation of America 1992 Service Report, “Characteristics of Abortion Patients,” 12.

percent of all childbearing women, have 31 percent of all abortions and whites, who account for 81 percent of women of childbearing age, have 61 percent.”<sup>80</sup>

“Abortion is the number-one killer of blacks in America,” says Rev. Hunter of LEARN. “We’re losing our people at the rate of 1,452 *a day*. That’s just pure genocide. There’s no other word for it. [Sanger’s] influence and the whole mindset that Planned Parenthood has brought into the black community ... say it’s okay to destroy your people. We bought into the lie; we bought into the propaganda.”<sup>81</sup>

Some blacks have even made abortion “rights” synonymous with civil rights.

“We’re destroying the destiny and purpose of others who should be here,” Hunter laments. “Who knows the musicians we’ve lost? Who knows the great leaders the black community has really lost? Who knows what great minds of economic power people have lost? What great teachers?” He recites an old African proverb: “No one knows whose womb holds the chief.”<sup>82</sup>

Hunter has personally observed the vestiges of Planned Parenthood’s eugenic past in the black community today. “When I travel around the country ... I can only think of one abortion clinic [I’ve seen] in a predominantly white neighborhood. The majority of clinics are in black neighborhoods.”<sup>83</sup>

Hunter noted the controversy that occurred two years ago in Louisiana involving school-based health clinics. The racist undertone could not have been more evident. In the Baton Rouge district, officials were debating placing clinics in the high schools. Black state representative Sharon Weston Broome initially supported the idea. She later expressed concern about clinics providing contraceptives and abortion counseling. “Clinics should promote abstinence,” she said.<sup>84</sup> Upon learning officials wanted to put the clinics in black schools only, Hunter urged her to suggest they be placed in white schools as well. At Broome’s suggestion, however, proposals for the school clinics were “dropped *immediately*,” reported Hunter.

Grant observed the same game plan 20 years ago. “During the 1980s when Planned Parenthood shifted its focus from community-based clinics to school-based clinics, it again targeted inner-city minority neighborhoods,” he writes.<sup>85</sup> “Of the more than 100 school-based clinics that have opened nationwide in the last decade [1980s], *none* has been at substantially all-white schools,” he adds. “*None* has been at suburban middle-class schools. *All* have been at black, minority or ethnic schools.”<sup>86</sup>

In 1987, a group of black ministers, parents and educators filed suit against the Chicago Board of Education. They charged the city’s school-based clinics with not only violating the state’s fornication laws, but also with discrimination against blacks. The clinics were a “calculated, pernicious effort to destroy the very fabric of family life [between] black parents and their children,” the suit alleged.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “Who Has Abortions? Survey by the Alan Guttmacher Institute contradicts popular notions about the kinds of women who receive abortions,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 19 August 1996, 8. The Centers for Disease Control’s (CDC) December 2000 report shows that while the number of abortions dropped more than 30,000 from 1996 to 1997, a record 36 percent—up from 32 percent in 1990—of all abortions were performed on black women, even though blacks comprised just 12 percent of the population. The report notes that abortion rates are higher in urban areas “where access to abortion is easier” (“Abortions Decline,” *USA Today*, 11 January 2001, 14A).

<sup>81</sup> Rev. Johnny M. Hunter, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 14 November 2000.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Sharon Weston Broome, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 16 November 2000.

<sup>85</sup> *Grand Illusions*, 98.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* The latest figures show 63 percent of school-based clinics are located in urban areas. Source: National Survey of School-Based Health Centers, 1997-98, *Making the Grade*, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University (<http://www.gwu.edu/~mtg/FS/fsmmap.html>). For more information on school-based clinics, see CWA’s March/April 2001 publication of *Family Voice*.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

One of the parents in the group was “shocked” when her daughter came home from school with Planned Parenthood material. “I never realized how racist those people were until I read the [information my daughter received] at the school clinic,” she said. “[They are worse than] the Klan ... because they’re so slick and sophisticated. Their bigotry is all dolled up with statistics and surveys, but just beneath the surface it’s as ugly as apartheid.”<sup>88</sup>

A more recent account uncovered a Planned Parenthood affiliate giving condoms to residents of a poor black neighborhood in Akron, Ohio.<sup>89</sup> The residents received a “promotional bag” containing, among other things: literature on sexually transmitted disease prevention, gynecology exams and contraception, a condom-case key chain containing a bright-green condom, and a coupon. The coupon was redeemable at three Ohio county clinics for a dozen condoms and a \$5 McDonald’s gift certificate. All the items were printed with Planned Parenthood phone numbers.

The affiliate might say they’re targeting high-pregnancy areas, but their response presumes destructive behavior on the part of the targeted group. Planned Parenthood has always been reluctant to promote, or encourage, abstinence as the only safeguard against teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, calling it “unrealistic.”

Rev. Richard Welch, president of Human Life International in Front Royal, Virginia, “blasted” the affiliate for targeting low-income, minority neighborhoods with the bags. He said the incident revealed “the racism inherent in promoting abortion and contraception in primarily minority neighborhoods.”<sup>90</sup>

He then criticized Planned Parenthood: “Having sprung from the racist dreams of a woman determined to apply abortion and contraception to eugenics and ethnic cleansing, Planned Parenthood remains true to the same strategy today.”<sup>91</sup>

## UNTANGLING THE DECEPTIVE WEB

Black leaders have been silent about Margaret Sanger’s evil machination against their community far too long. They’ve been silent about abortion’s devastating effects in their community—despite their pro-life inclination. “The majority of [blacks] are more pro-life than anything else,” said Hunter.<sup>92</sup> “Blacks were never taught to destroy their children; even in slavery they tried to hold onto their children.”

“Blacks are not quiet about the issue because they do not care, but rather because the truth has been kept from them. The issue is ... to educate our people,” said former Planned Parenthood board member LaVerne Tolbert.<sup>93</sup>

Today, a growing number of black pro-lifers are untying the deceptive web spun by Sanger. They are using truth to shed light on the lies. The “Say So” march is just one example of their burgeoning pro-life activism. As the marchers laid 1,452 roses at the courthouse steps—to commemorate the number of black babies aborted daily—spokesman Damon Owens said, “This calls national attention to the problem [of abortion]. This is an opportunity for blacks to speak to

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Lisa Ing, “Condom Giveaway Based On Profiling, Pro-Lifers Contend,” *The Washington Times*, 31 July 2000, A2.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> “African-Americans for Life: Black Baptist pastor speaks at Catholic Interparish Council,” *Gulf Coast Christian Newspaper*, February 1996 (<http://www.siteone.com/religion/gcc03/gabort.htm>).

<sup>93</sup> Michele Jackson, “Should Pro-Life Black Americans Work Separately or Join NRLC?” *National Right to Life Committee News*, March 1998 (<http://www.nrlc.org/news/1998/NRL3.98/blck.html>). NRLC has 50 state affiliates and nearly 3,000 chapters. It encourages action at the state and local levels.

other blacks. This doesn't solve all of our problems. But we will not solve our other problems with abortion.”

Black pro-lifers are also linking arms with their white pro-life brethren. Black Americans for Life (BAL) is an outreach group of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), a Washington, D.C.-based grassroots organization. NRLC encourages networking between black and white pro-lifers. “Our goal is to bring people together—from all races, colors, and religions—to work on pro-life issues,” said NRLC Director of Outreach Ernest Ohlhoff.<sup>94</sup> “Black Americans for Life is not a parallel group; we want to help African-Americans integrate communicational and functionally into the pro-life movement.”

Mrs. Beverly LaHaye, founder and chairman of Concerned Women for America, echoes the sentiment. “Our mission is to protect the right to life of all members of the human race. CWA welcomes like-minded women and men, from all walks of life, to join us in this fight.”

Concerned Women for America has a long history of fighting Planned Parenthood's evil agenda. The Negro Project is an obscure angle, but one that must come to light. Margaret Sanger sold black Americans an illusion. Now with the veil of deception removed, they can “choose life ... that [their] descendants may live.”

*Revised April 11, 2008*

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<sup>94</sup> Ernest Ohlhoff, interview by author, Washington, D.C., 6 April 2001.